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LARVAL DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH, AND SPAWNING OF STRIPED MULLET (*MUGIL CEPHALUS*) ALONG THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COAST OF THE UNITED STATES

By WILLIAM W. ANDERSON

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CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	501
Material	501
Methods	502
Occurrence of larval and juvenile forms	504
Development from larval to juvenile stages	504
Development of fins	504
Caudal	504
Dorsals	505
Anal	506
Pectorals	507
Ventrals	508
Pigmentation	508
Body proportions	509
Miscellaneous structures	509
Scales	509
Preorbital	509
Teeth	509
Adipose eyelid	513
Nostrils	513
Gill rakers	513
Growth	514
Spawning	515
Literature cited	518

ABSTRACT

The larval and juvenile development of the striped mullet (*Mugil cephalus*) is described and illustrated from about 4 mm. to 116 mm. standard length.

Striped mullet appear to spawn along the south Atlantic coast of the United States from lower Florida to North Carolina over a broad area extending from about the 20-fathom line into the Gulf Stream. The data indicate that spawning occurs from October to February, but is confined largely to the period of November to January, with the peak in December.

Young striped mullet apparently remain at sea until they are from 18 to 28 mm. long (mostly 20 to 25 mm.), at which time they move in to the coast. In Georgia these young appear as early as November on the outer beaches but apparently do not go into the marshy estuarine waters until January.

Growth of young striped mullet in Georgia is estimated. They grow slowly during the colder winter months, but with the warming of the waters in spring growth speeds up. From about March to October the size increase is about 17 mm. a month. Mullet from the earliest spawning (October) reach a length of about 160 mm. standard length by the end of their first year. Growth of mullet as estimated by various workers along the south Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States is summarized.

Development of teeth on the tongues of young mullet and loss in the adult are described and illustrated.

LARVAL DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH, AND SPAWNING OF STRIPED MULLET (*MUGIL CEPHALUS*) ALONG THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COAST OF THE UNITED STATES

By WILLIAM W. ANDERSON, *Fishery Research Biologist*

BUREAU OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

The striped mullet (*Mugil cephalus* Linnaeus) one of the most important food fishes of the outhern United States. It is of greatest impor-nce in Florida, where about 28 to 30 million ounds are taken annually. Fisheries of consider-le value exist in several other States—North arolina, South Carolina, Alabama, and Missis-ppi. Fishing is done mainly with gill nets, ammel nets, beach seines, and stop nets.

The species has a very wide distribution. ildebrand and Schroeder (1928, p. 196) give the abitat as, "Warm waters of both hemispheres; n the Atlantic coast of America from Cape Cod o Brazil."

That the early development of this important nd common shore fish in the Southern United tates has remained a mystery for many years is ifficult to believe, but is true. Jacot (1920, . 222), working with the species in North Caro-na, stated, "Thus nothing is known of the pawning grounds of this species and therefore of s eggs or larvae, the earliest stage known being he already well developed young * * *." Jacot's mallest specimens were about 23 mm. total ength. Higgins (1928, p. 625), who worked argely in North Carolina, said, "The larval stages f development of the mullet are unknown, but uvenile fish appear in the sounds about Beaufort n early February, when they are from 18 to 25 nillimeters in length." Kilby (1949, p. 7), vorking with striped mullet in Florida, said, "In view of its commercial value and the universally admitted desirability of its conservation and perpetuation as a natural resource of the state, t might be assumed that the life history of the mullet is well known. Such an assumption, however, would be in error, because little has been published on the young, and specimens less than 16 mm. in standard length are apparently unknown." Broadhead (1953, p. 9), working with *M. cephalus* in northwest Florida, stated, "Nothing is known of the egg and larval development and the young fish are first encountered in shallow water, at which time they are about one inch long."

During a biological, chemical, and oceanographic survey of waters off the south Atlantic coast of the United States with the Service's MV. *Theodore N. Gill*, larval specimens of striped mullet, ranging in standard length from about 4 mm. to 30 mm., were obtained in the plankton and dip-net collections—providing a basis for contributing to a better understanding of the life history of one more economically important fish of the region.

This paper describes and illustrates the early larval development of striped mullet; gives occurrence of larval stages in the open ocean; discusses movement of the larvae from open ocean to inshore areas and their development and growth to juvenile size in the inshore areas; and discusses period and location of spawning.

MATERIAL

General information concerning striped mullet larvae taken in plankton tows and by dip net during cruises of the MV. *Theodore N. Gill* is presented in tables 1 and 2; locations of capture are illustrated in figure 1. (Cruise 1, February 10 to March 10, 1953; cruise 2, April 16 to May 15, 1953; cruise 3, July 15 to August 16, 1953; cruise 4, October 1 to November 14, 1953; cruise 5, January 20 to February 25, 1954; cruise 6, April 14 to April 29, 1954; cruise 7, June 9 to July 13, 1954; cruise 8, August 27 to October 1, 1954; and cruise 9, November 3 to December 12, 1954.)

Occurrence of young striped mullet in the seine collections of two areas in Georgia (open ocean beach and salt marsh) with respect to date, approximate abundance, and size range is presented in tables 3 and 4.

NOTE.—Approved for publication, October 25, 1957. Fishery Bulletin 144.

TABLE 1.—*Larvae of the striped mullet* (Mugil cephalus) *taken in plankton tows on* Theodore N. Gill *cruises 5 and 9, in 195*

[No larvae were taken on the other 7 cruises]

Station number	Date	Position		Number of larvae (standard length)			
		North latitude	West longitude	3–5 mm.	5.1–7 mm.	7.1–10 mm.	10.1–20 mm.
Cruise 5:							
2–3	Jan. 30	27°02′	79°52′	1	1		
3	do	27°00′	80°03′	2			
3–4	do	27°10′	80°04′	1			
4	do	27°20′	80°03′	14	2		
10	Feb. 1	28°19′	80°12′		2		
14	Feb. 2	29°00′	80°10′		3		
50–49	Feb. 15	32°00′	78°16′	1			
63	Feb. 21	33°15′	76°22′				
71	Feb. 22	34°03′	76°15′			1	
Cruise 9:							
51	Dec. 4	32°20′	77°35′	1			
52	do	32°35′	77°47′	2			
59	Dec. 5	33°22′	77°37′	1			
60	do	33°08′	77°20′	1			
70	Dec. 8	34°18′	76°31′	1			
71	do	34°03′	76°15′		1		

TABLE 2.—*Larvae of the striped mullet* (Mugil cephalus) *taken in dip nets on* Theodore N. Gill *cruises 1 and 5, 1953–5*

[No larvae were taken on the other 7 cruises]

Station number	Date	Position		Number of larvae (standard length)			
		North latitude	West longitude	10.1–15 mm.	15.1–20 mm.	20.1–25 mm.	25.1–3[illegible] mm.
Cruise 1:	*1953*						
Cape Canaveral	Feb. 19	28°26′	80°32′			1	
35	Feb. 26	31°20′	80°52′			1	
73	Mar. 6	34°09′	75°22′			5	
Cruise 5:	*1954*						
Standard Station	Jan. 24	26°20′	76°44′			1	
Office of Naval Research	Jan. 27	25°30′	76°30′				
Do	Jan. 28	25°30′	76°30′	1			
4	Jan. 30	27°20′	80°03′			1	
5	do	27°40′	80°03′			1	
6	Jan. 31	27°40′	79°41′			2	
15	Feb. 2	28°59′	79°48′			7	
20	Feb. 4	29°39′	80°45′			4	
37	Feb. 10	31°38′	80°17′		1	21	
38	do	31°36′	79°51′		1	57	
49	Feb. 15	32°11′	78°26′	1			
75	Feb. 22	34°39′	75°53′			6	
76	do	34°53′	76°09′		3		

TABLE 3.—*Occurrence of young striped mullet* (Mugil cephalus) *in seine collections on St. Simons Beach, Ga., by date, approximate abundance, and size range*

[Size—standard length]

Date	Number	Approximate size range (mm.)	Date	Number	Approximate size range (mm.)
Jan. 4, 1956	34	22 to 26.	June 11, 1956	2	46 and 62.
Jan. 15, 1954	Many	20 to 25.	June 22, 1955	1	108.
Jan. 16, 1956	14	20 to 26.	July 21, 1953	1	107.
	4	96 to 195.	July 24, 1956	7	79 to 116.
Jan. 28, 1954	Many	19 to 24.	Aug. 5, 1955	2	104 and 127.
Jan. 30, 1956	Many	18 to 27.	Aug. 8, 1956	1	131.
	3	111 to 154.	Aug. 24, 1956	2	79 and 91.
Feb. 12, 1954	Many	20 to 28.	Sept. 9, 1956	2	75 and 85.
Feb. 15, 1956	Many	18 to 28.	Sept. 27, 1956	1	165.
	1	150.	Oct. 5, 1955	5	151 to 157.
Feb. 29, 1956	Many	18 to 29.	Nov. 3, 1955	1	160.
Mar. 11, 1954	10	21 to 22.	Nov. 16, 1955	1	150.
Mar. 11, 1955	17	20 to 25.	Nov. 19, 1954	4	18 to 19.
Mar. 25, 1955	1	20.	Nov. 20, 1956	4	118 to 143.
Mar. 29, 1954	9	19 to 24.	Dec. 2, 1955	Many	114 to 171.
Mar. 29, 1956	43	19 to 35.	Dec. 8, 1953	5	20 to 21.
Apr. 13, 1956	Many	19 to 40.	Dec. 18, 1956	17	100 to 218.
May 14, 1956	1	164.	Dec. 19, 1955	33	19 to 22.
May 28, 1956	1	53.		2	102 and 111.

Mrs. Fanny Lee Phillips kindly loaned me collection of small striped mullet she obtained a Miami, Fla.: Crandon Park, January 21, 195 7 specimens about 8 to 12 mm. standard length Crandon Beach, January 22, 1957, 5 specimen about 8 to 11 mm.; Crandon Park Beach, Januar 27, 1957, 5 specimens about 12 to 15 mm.; an Crandon Park Beach, January 28, 1957, 4 spec mens about 14 to 18 mm.

METHODS

The manner of conducting plankton tows, di netting, and all other procedures used aboard th MV. *Theodore N. Gill* are discussed in Anderson Gehringer, and Cohen (1956).

Seine collections in Georgia on the open ocea beach on St. Simons Island and in the marsh

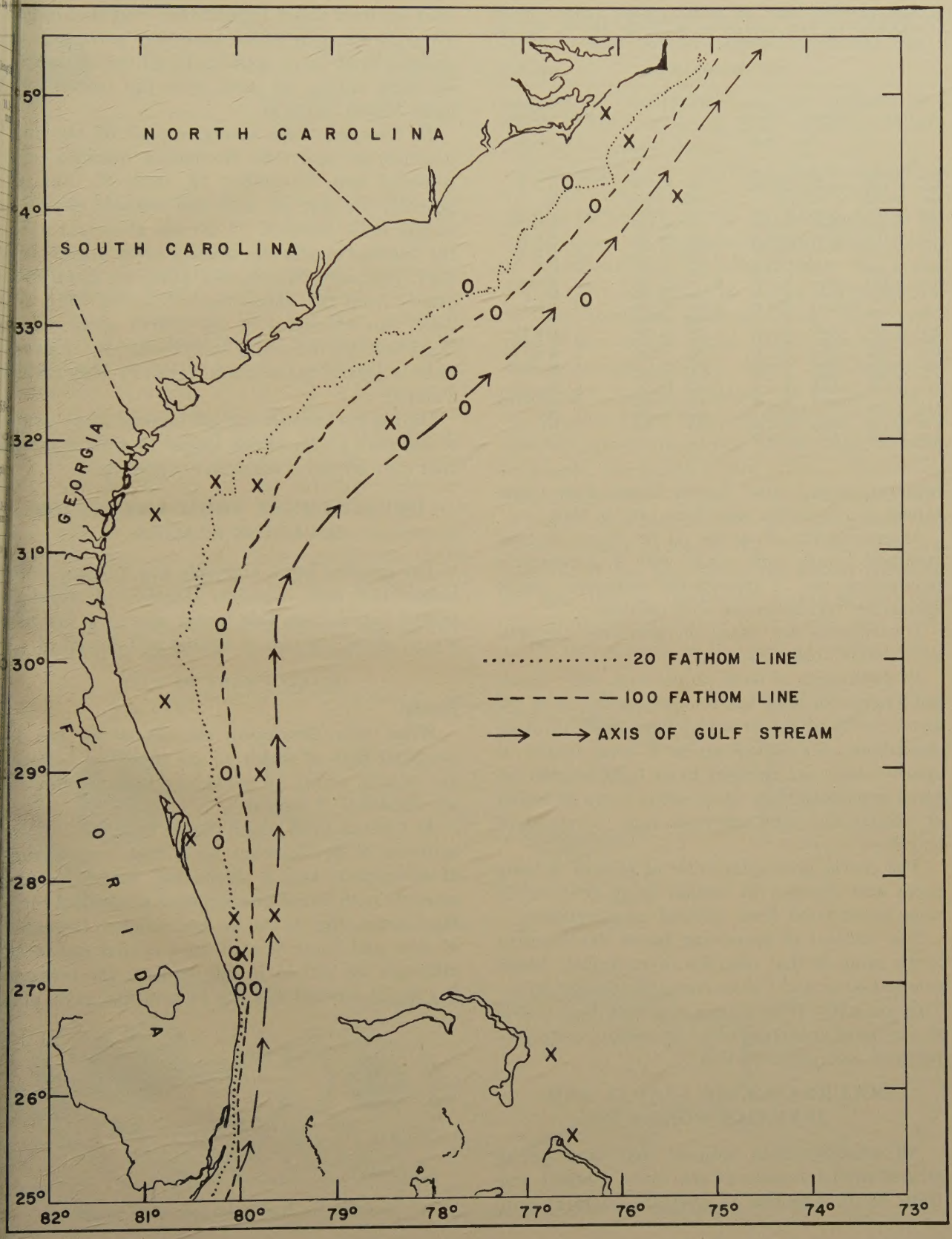

FIGURE 1.—Locations of capture of striped mullet larvae in plankton tows (circles), and by dip nets (X). (See tables 1 and 2 for occurrence data.)

TABLE 4.—*Occurrence of young striped mullet* (Mugil cephalus) *in seine collections in Sapelo Marsh, Ga., by date, approximate abundance, and size range*

[Size—standard length]

Date	Number	Approximate size range (mm.)	Date	Number	Approximate size range (mm.)
Jan. 4, 1956	16	22 to 28.	Apr. 27, 1956	Many	21 to 43.
Jan. 15, 1954	Many	19 to 29.		1	154.
Jan. 16, 1956	1	22.	May 4, 1954	1	56.
Jan. 28, 1954	Many	20 to 28.	May 6, 1953	Many	37 to 62.
Jan. 30, 1956	Many	19 to 23.	May 18, 1954	7	58 to 72.
Feb. 12, 1954	Many	19 to 29.	May 20, 1953	3	50 to 64.
Feb. 15, 1956	Many	22 to 28.	May 24, 1955	15	39 to 62.
	2	128 and 141.	May 28, 1956	47	30 to 53.
Feb. 29, 1956	12	20 to 25.	June 9, 1955	1	48.
Mar. 11, 1954	Many	24 to 37.	June 11, 1956	29	39 to 54.
Mar. 11, 1955	Many	24 to 34.	June 18, 1953	1	63.
Mar. 15, 1956	Many	22 to 32.	June 26, 1956	10	35 to 54.
	3	92 to 118.	July 8, 1955	1	60.
Mar. 24, 1953	Many	24 to 40.	July 10, 1956	7	43 to 65.
Mar. 25, 1955	Many	24 to 34.	July 24, 1956	13	47 to 61.
Mar. 29, 1954	Many	22 to 40.	Aug. 8, 1956	2	59 and 69.
Mar. 29, 1956	Many	19 to 34.	Sept. 19, 1955	2	60 and 80.
Apr. 8, 1955	Many	20 to 40.	Oct. 14, 1955	1	97.
Apr. 13, 1956	Many	22 to 38.	Oct. 23, 1956	2	80 and 91.
Apr. 16, 1954	Many	20 to 52.	Nov. 3, 1955	2	114 and 143.
	3	118 to 130.	Nov. 16, 1955	1	125.
Apr. 22, 1953	Many	26 to 56.	Dec. 2, 1955	1	145.
Apr. 25, 1955	Many	30 to 50.			

estuarine area behind Sapelo Island were maintained on a biweekly basis from 1953 to 1956.

Measurements of larvae up to about 30 mm. standard length were made with a stereoscopic microscope and a micrometer eyepiece; larger specimens were measured with calipers.

Descriptions are based on preserved material unless stated otherwise.

In discussions of body proportions, only standard lengths (in small specimens from the tip of the snout to tip of the urostyle) were used; in other discussions, the larvae up to a total length of about 7 mm. are referred to in total lengths (in small specimens from tip of snout to tip of finfold or caudal fin), and above 7 mm. in standard length.

The curves portraying rates of growth of body parts and changes in certain body proportions were constructed from original measurements.

The method of presenting larval development is the same as that used for silver mullet, *Mugil curema* Cuvier and Valenciennes (Anderson 1957a). This generally follows Ahlstrom and Ball (1954) in discussing sequences of fin formation, body proportions, and pigmentation.

OCCURRENCE OF LARVAL AND JUVENILE FORMS

All available data indicate that most young striped mullet remain at sea (over a broad area from North Carolina to southern Florida) until they are from about 18 to 28 mm. long (but larger 20 to 25 mm.), at which time they move into t coast. They have apparently all moved insho by early spring, as none were dip netted aft early March (table 2).

In Georgia, these young appear on the out beaches as early as November (earliest da recorded was November 19, table 3), but a parently do not go into the marshy estuari waters until January. They are abundant alon the beaches and in the marshy areas during Ja uary, February, March, and April; are apparentl absent from the outer beaches during May an June, but abundant in the marsh areas durin these months, indicating the population of you to be largely in the estuarine areas by May (tabl 3 and 4).

During the summer and fall months these you of less than a year of age appear to scatter out s that they are never taken in abundance.

DEVELOPMENT FROM LARVAL TO JUVENILE STAGES

The smallest larva available was 4.0 mm. tota length (3.9 mm. standard length). A develop mental series from this larval size to a juvenil size of about 116 mm. is figured and described.

DEVELOPMENT OF FINS

Caudal

When fully developed, the caudal fin has 1 principal rays of which 12 are branched. There are usually about 15 secondary rays of which 7 are dorsal and 8 ventral.

At 4.0 mm. total length (fig. 2) the caudal shows evidence of development by a deep constriction of the finfold and a thickening ventral to the urostyle with initial development of about 7 rays. By 5.4 mm. (fig. 3) the fin has rounded, increased in size, and there is a distinct caudal peduncle, although the finfold is still evident; the urostyle has flexed upward and the 14 principal rays, plus

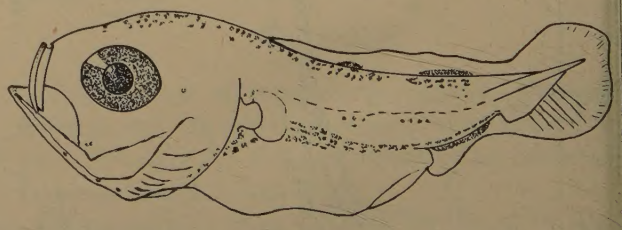

FIGURE 2.—Larva, 4.0 mm. total length.

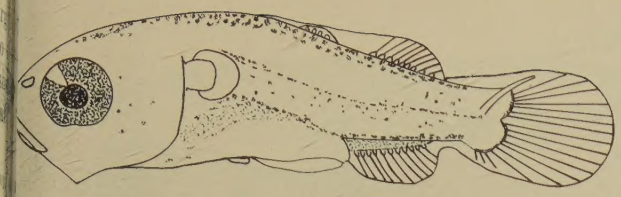

FIGURE 3.—Larva, 5.4 mm. total length.

bout 3 ventral secondary rays, are visible. At bout 6.7 mm. (fig. 4) some finfold remains, the in has further increased in size, the caudal peduncle has changed form, the urostyle has reached ts maximum flexion, and two dorsal secondary rays have developed. By 6.2 mm. standard length (7.9 mm. total length) the fin has lost the finfold and has about 4 each of dorsal and ventral secondary rays (fig. 5). A full complement of rays, 14 principal and 15 secondary, is present on the 9.7-mm. standard length specimen (fig. 6). By 12.1 mm. (fig. 7) forking of the fin has begun and the middle six of the principal rays are branched. Twelve rays are branched by 19.8 mm. (fig. 8) and the fin has reached final shape by 116 mm. (figs. 9 to 11). Only main forking of the 12 branched principal rays is shown in figures 10 and 11.

The caudal skeleton of a 25-mm. specimen is illustrated in figure 12. It is almost identical to the caudal structure given for *M. curema* by Hollister (1937, pp. 271–274).

Dorsals

A normal complement of rays consists of 4 spines in the first dorsal, and 1 spine and 8 soft-rays in the second dorsal.

Development of the dorsal fins is evident at 4.0 mm. total length by a thickening at the position of the bases (fig. 2), although the ray bases cannot be distinguished; the dorsal finfold is prominent and continuous with the caudal finfold. By 5.4 mm. (fig. 3) the 4 ray bases of the first dorsal are evident, the ray bases and 9 rays of the second dorsal (full complement) are well developed, and the finfold has become reduced and changed in shape. At 6.7 mm. (fig. 4) the 4 spines of the first dorsal are well developed and the rays of the second dorsal have increased in length; the finfold is still visible. The finfold has disappeared by 6.2 mm. standard length (7.9 mm. total length), and both spines and rays have increased in length (fig. 5). Branching has occurred in the last ray of the second dorsal by 9.7 mm. (fig. 6), in the last 2 rays at 12.1 mm. (fig. 7), in the last 7 rays at 19.8 mm., and barely in the first soft-ray at 26.9 mm. Development of

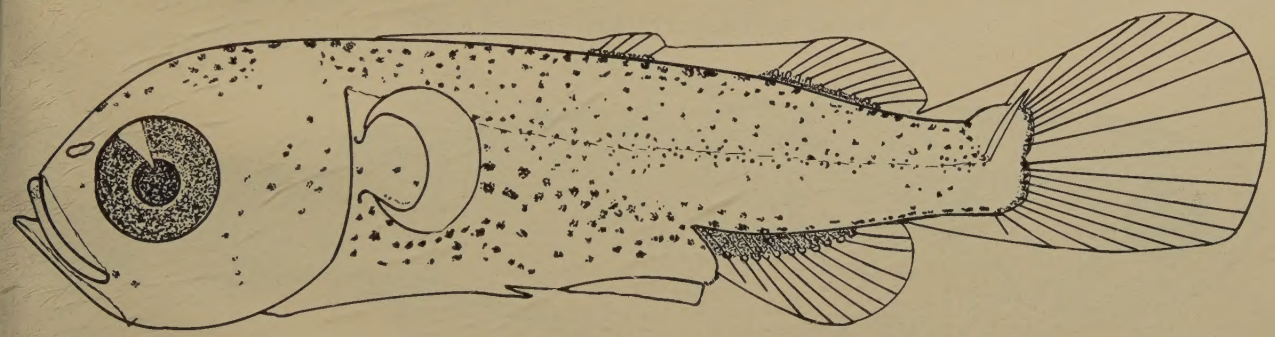

FIGURE 4.—Larva, 6.7 mm. total length.

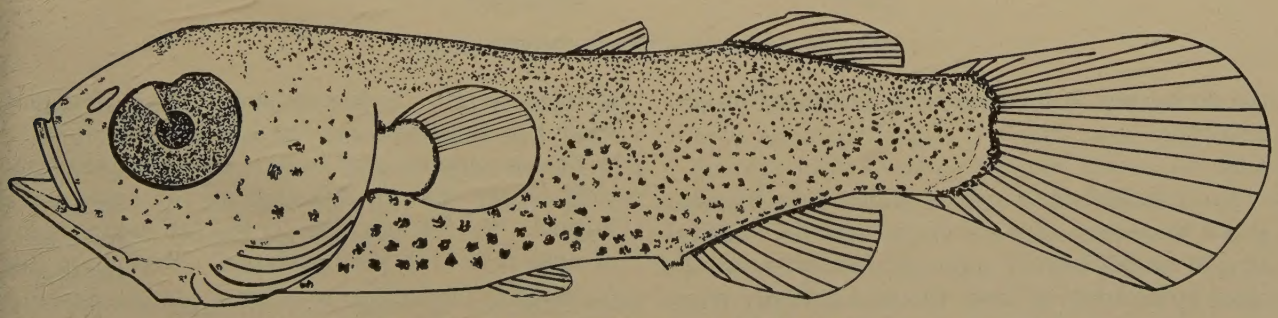

FIGURE 5.—Larva, 6.2 mm. standard length (7.9 mm. total length).

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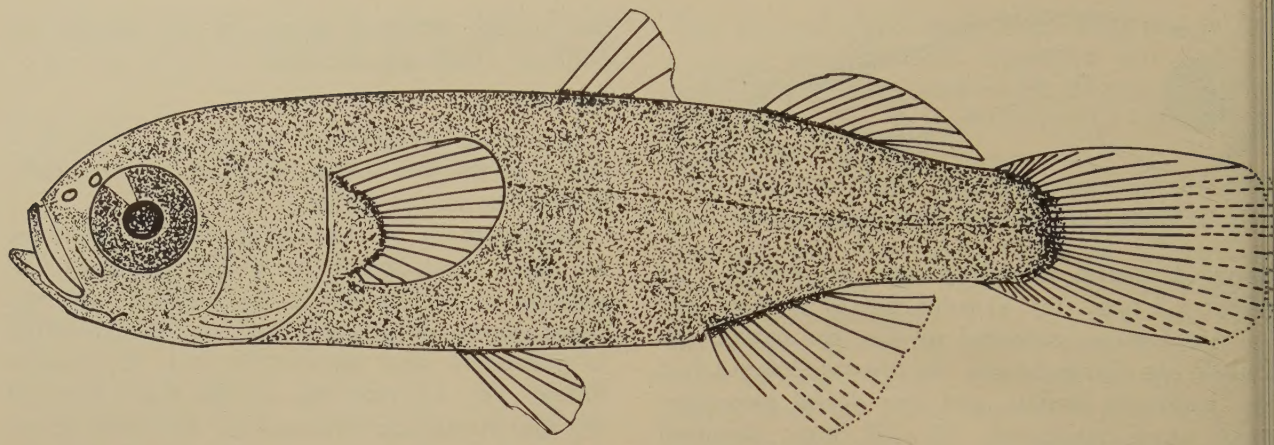

FIGURE 6.—Larva, 9.7 mm. standard length.

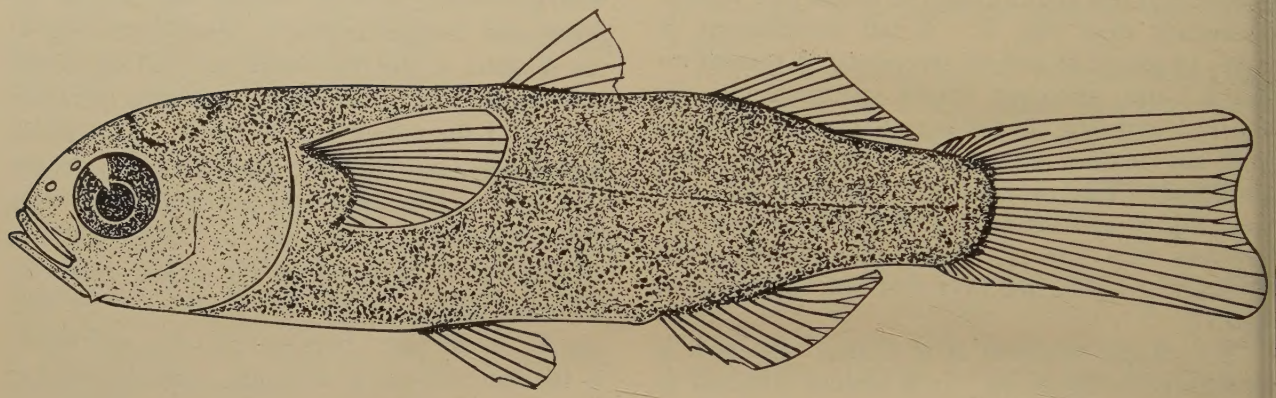

FIGURE 7.—Larva, 12.1 mm. standard length.

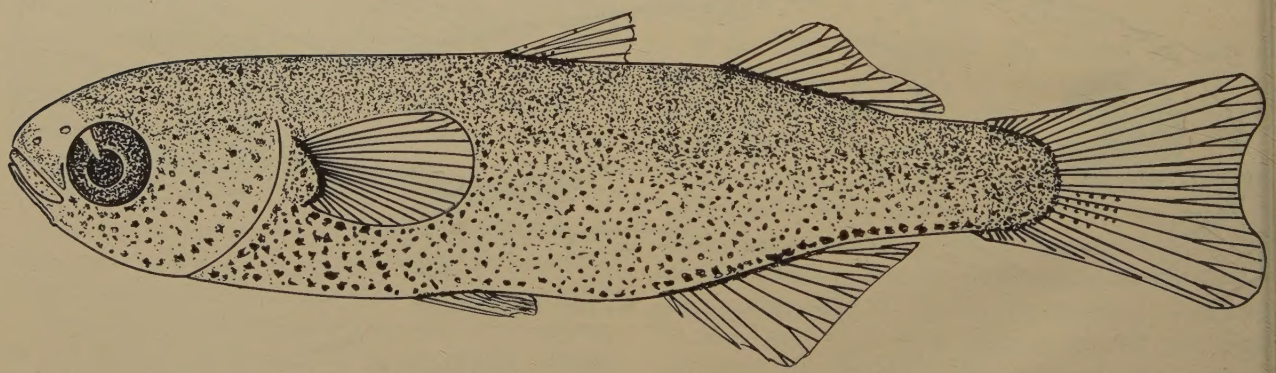

FIGURE 8.—Larva, 19.8 mm. standard length.

the dorsal fins to final shape is illustrated in figs. 8 to 11.

Anal

Juvenile and adult striped mullet have 3 spines and 8 branched soft-rays in the anal fin. Larval striped mullet have 2 spines and 9 soft-rays, the third spine forming from the first soft-ray when the young are between about 35 and 45 mm. standard length. I class the specimens as juveniles when this third anal ray has fused into a spine.

The developing anal base is visible at 4.0 mm. total length (fig. 2), although no ray bases have formed. By 5.4 mm. (fig. 3) the full complement of anal rays (11) has developed. Branching has occurred in the last ray at 6.2 mm. standard length (7.9 mm. total length), in the last 5 rays at 12.1

FIGURE 9.—Larva, 26.9 mm. standard length.

FIGURE 10.—Juvenile, 55 mm. standard length.

FIGURE 11.—Juvenile, 116 mm. standard length.

mm., and in the last 8 rays by 19.8 mm. (figs. 5 to 8). The finfold is lost between 6.7 and 7.9 mm. total length (figs. 4 to 5). Final fin shape is reached in juveniles between 55 mm. and 116 mm. (figs. 10 and 11).

Pectorals

The pectoral fin is evident at 4.0 mm. total length as a fleshy, rayless structure. No rays are discernible at 6.7 mm. total length but at 6.2 mm. standard length (7.9 mm. total length) 9 or 10 rays have developed in the upper part of the fin (figs. 4 and 5). The full complement of rays (16 or 17—rarely 15 or 18) is present in the 9.7-mm. specimen (fig. 6). Branching of the rays and development of this fin to final shape are demonstrated in figures 8 to 11.

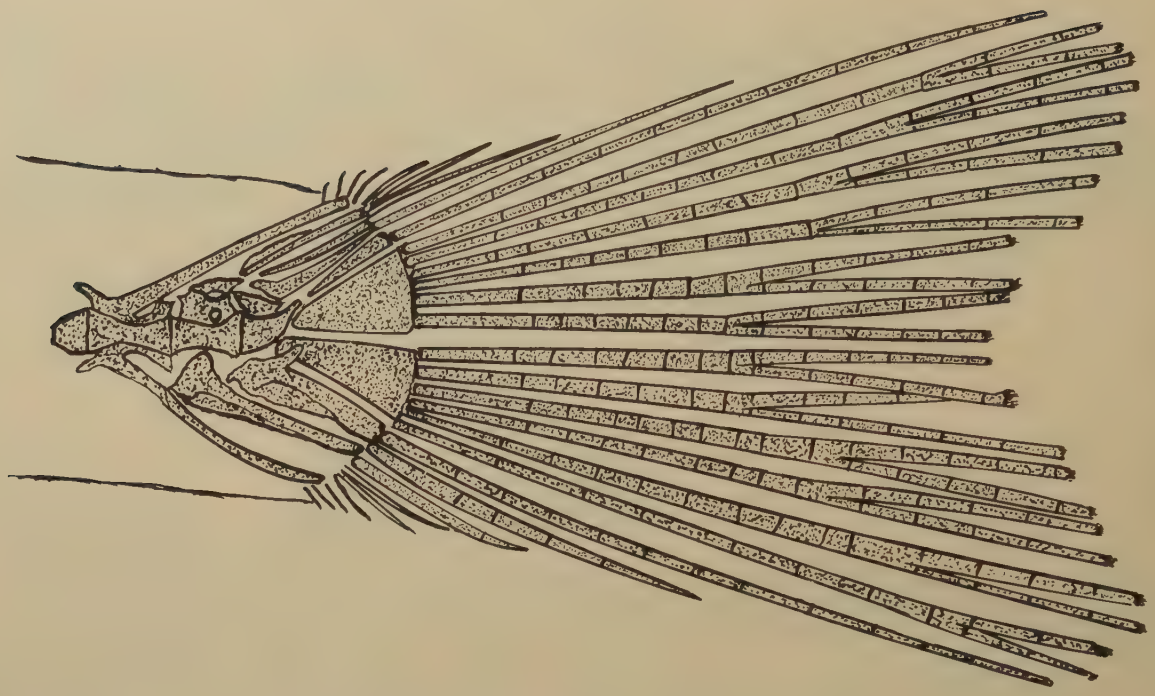

FIGURE 12.—Caudal skeleton of a 25-mm. specimen. (Camera Lucida drawing from cleared and stained material.)

Ventrals

Ventral-fin buds are not present at 4.0 mm. total length but have formed by 5.4 mm. (figs. 2 and 3). Rays are present at 6.2 mm. standard length (7.9 mm. total length) and the full complement of 6 rays is present at 9.7 mm. (figs. 5 and 6).

PIGMENTATION

At about 4.0 mm. total length (fig. 2) pigment spots occur dorsally from the head through the position of the second dorsal fin, on the ventral aspect of the body from the anus to the developing caudal peduncle and along the dorsal surface of the body cavity from the pectoral fin to the anus, scattered along the midline of the body, and scattered sparsely on the sides of the head.

In the sea-stage larvae, from about 5 to 27 mm., development of pigment on the body and head is a process of spreading and intensifying as illustrated in figures 3 to 9. One of the striking characteristics is the large, less-numerous melanophores on the ventral aspect of the body as compared with the smaller, more numerous ones of the dorsal aspect. In some specimens, as in figures 6 and 7, the more typical pigmentation described gives way to pigmentation so dense as to make the specimens almost black.

In juveniles of about 55 mm. (fig. 10) the larger melanophores have disappeared and the fish have a peppered appearance with numerous small pigment spots on the dorsal aspect which thin rapidly toward the belly—pigment is absent on the lower sides of the head and body. Between this size and about 116 mm. the typical "striped" pigmentation develops (fig. 11).

At 12.1 mm. (fig. 7) there is no pigmentation in any of the fins, but at 19.8 and 26.9 mm. there are a few pigment spots in the first dorsal fin and a patch on the caudal fin (figs. 8 and 9). By 55 mm.—and remaining essentially the same at 116 mm.—pigment has developed in the second dorsal, anal, and pectoral fins, and has intensified as illustrated in figures 10 and 11.

Young striped mullet go through what has been termed a "silvery" stage. Kilby's (1949, p. 15) description is better than most accounts in the literature:

> Living individuals are of a brilliant silver ventrally and laterally and show no pattern on the sides. Dorsolaterally the silver becomes progressively duller until the color reaches a dusky tan on the dorsal surfaces of the head and body. All surfaces are irridescent and show flashes of pale, whitish blue as the light strikes the fish from different angles.

is smallest specimens were 16 mm. standard ngth. He also states that the silvery coloration des rapidly when the specimens are preserved formalin and becomes dull and dusky within few days. Jacot (1920, p. 205) found this ilvery" stage in specimens 23 mm. (his smallest) about 32 mm. total length, but found it difficult distinguish those from 30 to 35 mm. as silvery dusky, because the two colors merged at this ze.

BODY PROPORTIONS

The relations of distances from snout to insertions of the first dorsal fin, second dorsal fin, and nal fin, to standard length show less variation nan the other characters studied. There is an itial rapid rate of increase up to about 6 mm., slowing down between about 6 mm. and 25 to 0 mm., a slight upward shift in the regression nes at about 25 to 30 mm., and then rather niform development to about 200 mm. These elationships are illustrated in figures 13 and 14.

The relations of head length, eye diameter, and ody depth at pectoral to standard length are lustrated in figures 14 and 15. The same general pattern of development occurred as in relations of distances from snout to insertions of fins standard length—an initial rapid rate of increase to about 6 mm., a slowing down between mm. and 25 to 30 mm., an upward shift in the egression lines at about 25 to 30 mm. (30 to 40 nm. for eye diameter), followed by a rather uniorm rate of development to about 200 mm.—ut the variations were greater. I found a simlar pattern of development in the silver mullet, *M. curema* (Anderson 1957a).

MISCELLANEOUS STRUCTURES

Scales

These structures begin to develop when the arvae are between 8 and 10 mm. standard length, nd are well developed and evident over the body nd head in specimens 12 to 14 mm. Jacot (1920) gave a detailed account of scale characters and development in young from about 23 mm. total ength (about 19 mm. standard length) up to dults.

Preorbital

The preorbital bone becomes evident in specimens between 8 and 10 mm. standard length, ut there are no serrations at this stage—serraions become evident in specimens between 15 and 19 mm. I found a range of from 7 to 13 serrations on the preorbital bones of larvae between about 19 and 30 mm. Anderson (1957b) illustrates the preorbital, maxillary, and premaxillary bones of a 30-mm. specimen of *M. cephalus* in comparison with those of *M. curema* and *Agonostomus monticola* (Bancroft). Jacot (1920, p. 205) said of *M. cephalus*—

> The *preorbital* in the juvenile stage has some 10 or 12 points, teeth or serrations, of fair size. As the fish grows these points become more and more numerous, less slender and less distinct. In older fish they become blunt and stocky until in a large individual (502 mm.) there were 53 teeth on the margin, crowded so as to place about 4 to a millimeter.

Teeth

The best description of adult teeth characters for the genus *Mugil* is given by Schultz (1946, p. 389)—

> the teeth in the lower lip are setiform or ciliform, partly embedded or conspicuous; teeth in upper lip similar. The outer row of teeth in both lips is usually more prominent, with simple tips, and if inner rows occur these are either bifid or trifid, at least on adults (apparently the teeth in certain species of this genus become bifid or even trifid in large adults); * * *

He also stated—

> In this genus I find that in small specimens of certain species the teeth have simple tips, but later the inner teeth have bifid tips and in the largest adults some possess trifid tips. The teeth of the outer row usually have simple tips, but in some large specimens these are bifid too.

I found no evidence of developing teeth in a series of striped mullet larvae ranging between 12 and 15 mm. In a 17.5-mm. specimen, I found a single row of 8 to 10 small, simple-tipped teeth barely protruding from each half of the upper lip—none in the lower lip. In cleared and stained specimens of about 19.5 mm., I found from 15 to 20 simple-tipped teeth in a single row in each half of the upper lip—none in the lower lip. A cleared and stained 25-mm. specimen had about 23 to 24 simple-tipped teeth in a single row in each half of the upper lip (these teeth were beginning to curve inward at the tips), and a single row of about 15 simple-tipped teeth in each half of the lower lip.

Cleared and stained mouthparts of a 52-mm. specimen revealed the upper lip had a double row of teeth—the outer row having much larger teeth, which curved inward at the tips much in resemblance of a leaf rake. There were about 42 to 44 simple-tipped teeth to each side of the lip in the

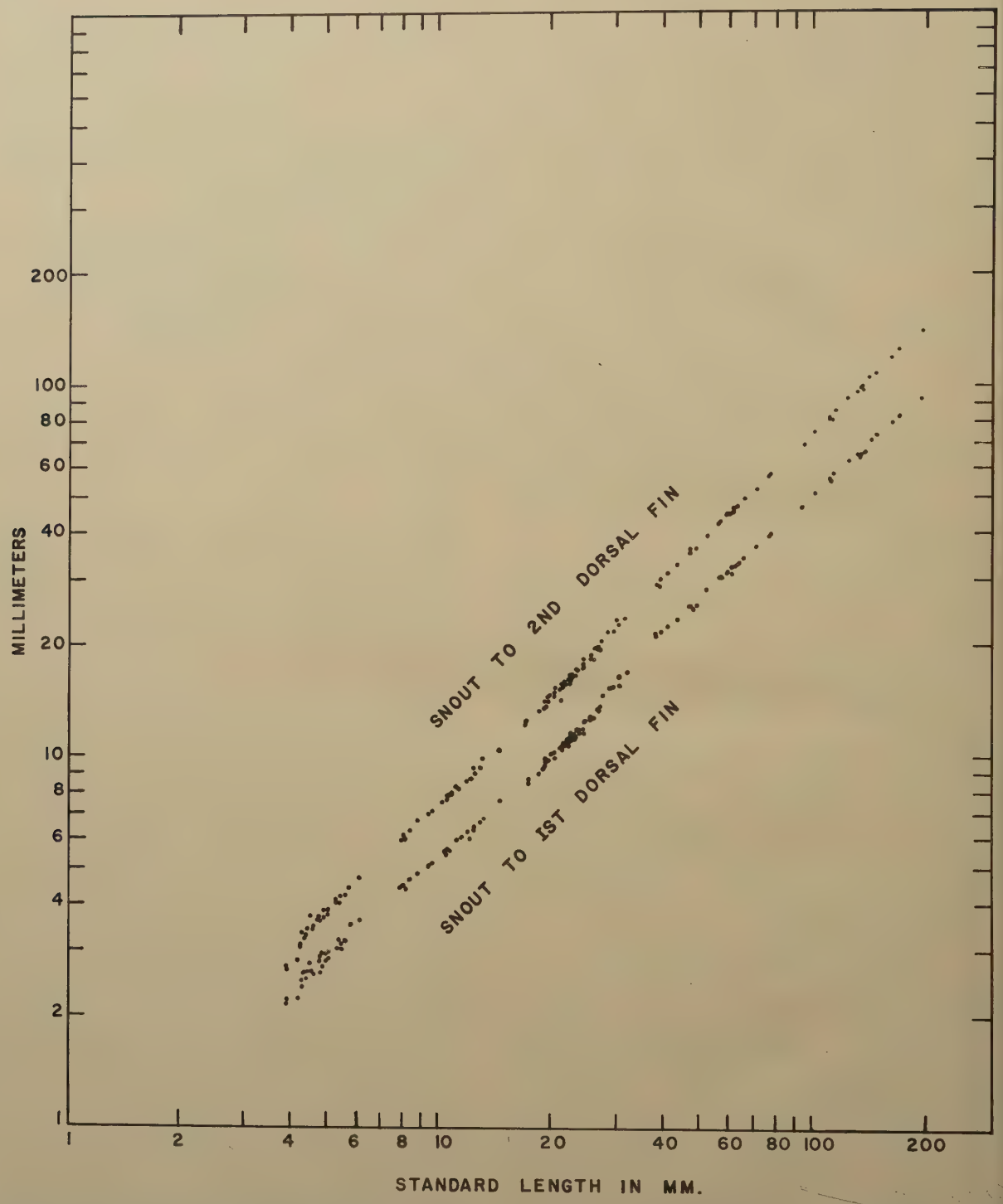

FIGURE 13.—Relation of the distances from snout to insertions of first and second dorsal fins to standard length. (Specimens smaller than 7 mm. were from plankton tows in open ocean; some specimens about 8 to 18/⑱ mm. were take near Miami, Fla. (see Material, p. 502), and some were dip netted in open ocean; specimens 15 to 28 mm. were di netted in open ocean; and those 29 to about 200 mm. were seined from marsh and beach areas in Georgia.)

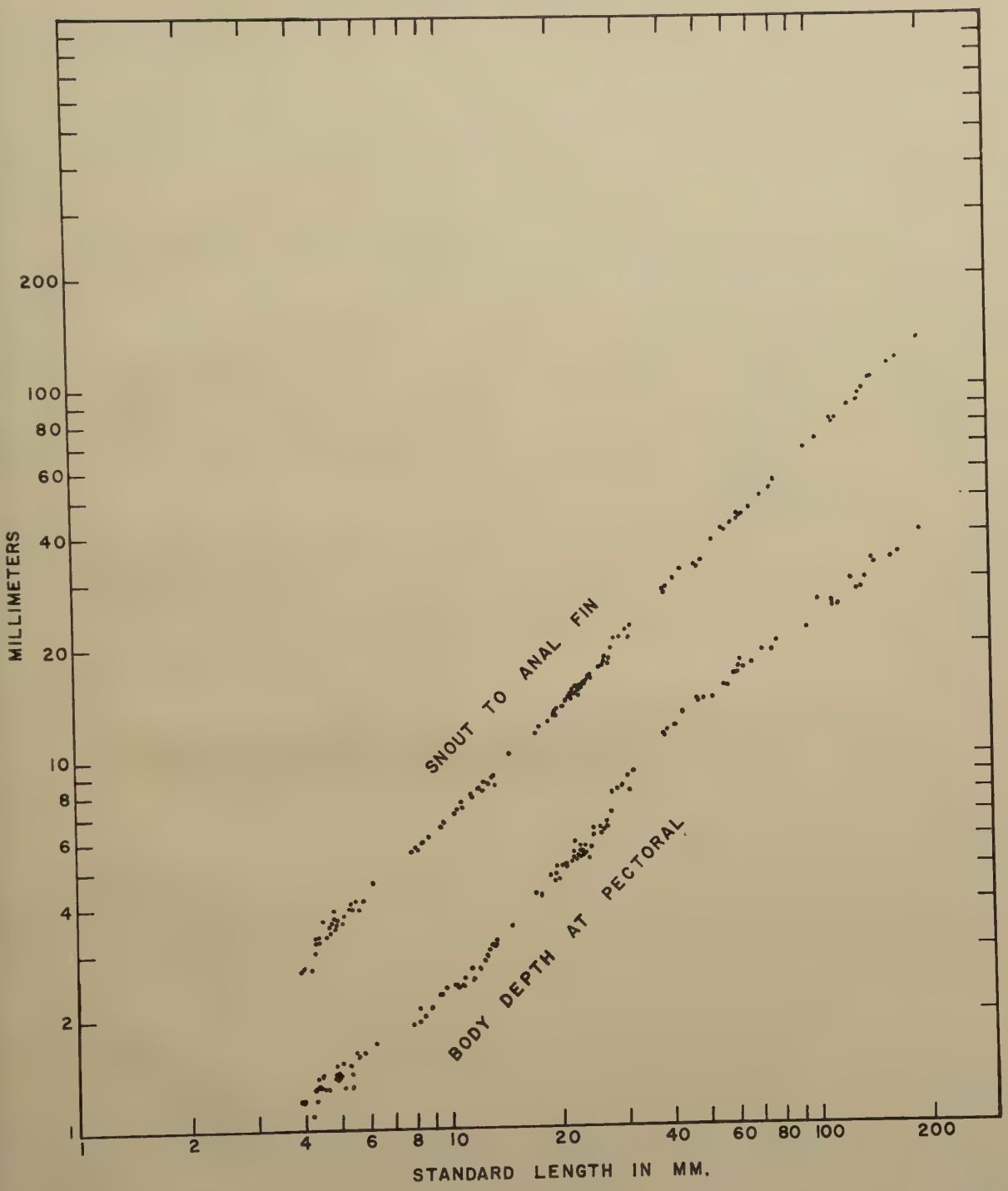

FIGURE 14.—Relation of the distance from snout to insertion of anal fin and of body depth at pectoral to standard length.

outer row, and about 33 to 35 inward pointing, bifid-tipped teeth to each side in the inner row. The lower lip had about 45 to 48 simple-tipped teeth in a single row to each half of the lip.

In the cleared and stained mouthparts of a 105-mm. specimen, there were about 62 to 64 teeth with simple tips to each half of the upper lip in the outer row. The inner set of teeth of the

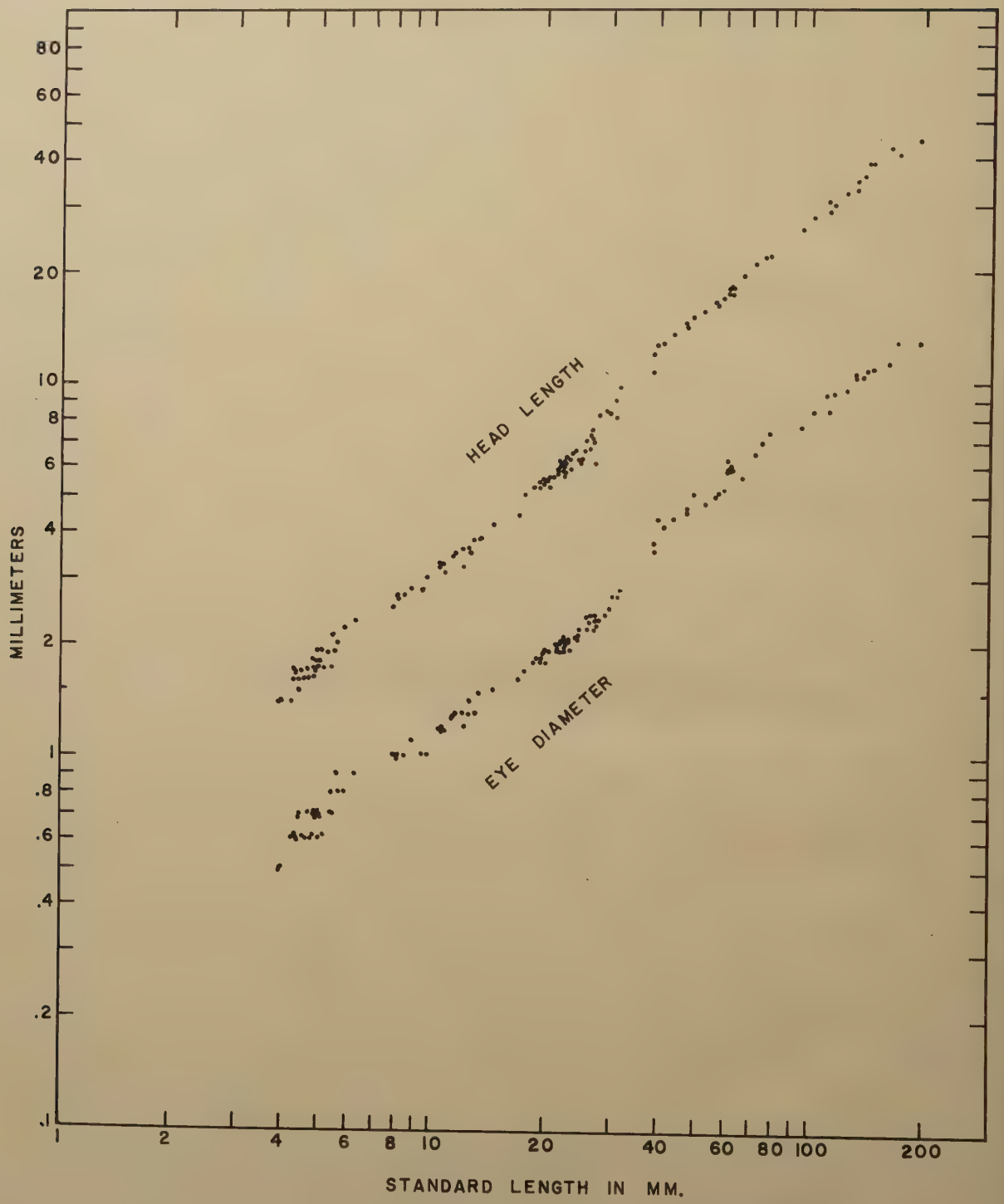

FIGURE 15.—Relation of head length and of eye diameter to standard length.

upper lip was no longer in a single series, but rather was "brushlike" in arrangement with 2 to 4 close-set rows—there were about 130 to 150 teeth to each half of the lip, all with bifid tips and curving inward. There were two rows of teeth in a single series in the lower lip—those of the outer row much the larger. In the outer row, there were 80 to 85 teeth to each half of the lip, all with simple

upcurved tips; and in the inner row from 50 to 55 to each half of the lip, all with bifid tips.

Schultz (1946, p. 389) indicated that in the genus *Mugil*, teeth are probably not present on the vomer, palatines, and tongue. Examinations of cleared and stained material of *M. cephalus* verified the absence of teeth on the vomer and palatines.

The tongue presents a peculiar picture of development of teeth in the larval and juvenile stages and of their loss in the adult stage. In a 19-mm. standard length specimen, about 16 small, simple-tipped teeth were arranged around the edges of the tongue (fig. 16). Development of the teeth and bony structures supporting them in specimens of 29, 59, and 117 mm. standard length is illustrated in figures 17 to 19. The tongue from a 390-mm. adult had no teeth on the outer surface, but when the outer covering of the tongue was removed the bony structures (without teeth) shown in figure 20 were found embedded in the tongue. It would appear that with age the teeth and supporting structures are overgrown, with the teeth and at least part of the bony structures being absorbed.

The cleared and stained tongues from 60-mm. and 122-mm. specimens of *M. curema* had no teeth or bony structures.

FIGURE 16.—Teeth on the tongue of a 19-mm. specimen. (Camera Lucida drawing from cleared and stained material.)

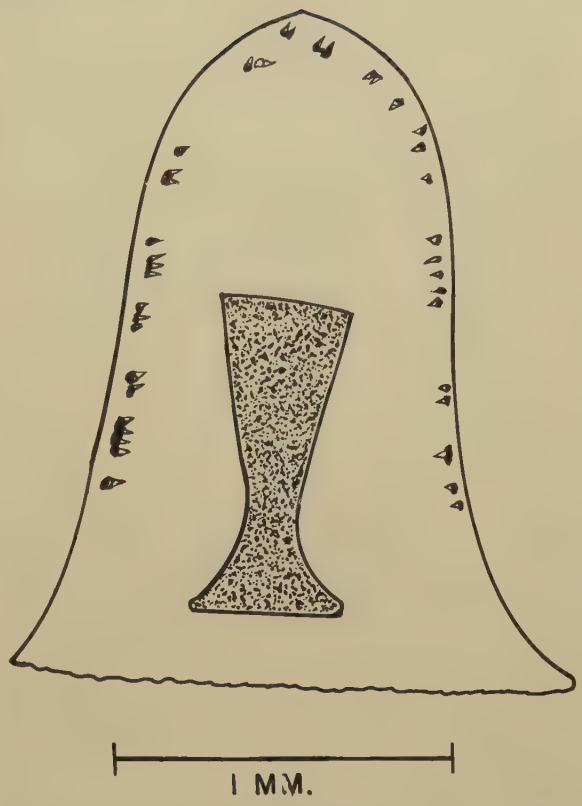

FIGURE 17.—Teeth on the tongue of a 29-mm. specimen. (Camera Lucida drawing from cleared and stained material.)

Adipose eyelid

This structure is not evident in specimens under 30 mm., but appears to begin development at sizes between 30 and 40 mm. By about 50 mm. it is well developed and covers much of the eye (fig. 10). A detailed account of this structure is given by Jacot (1920, pp. 205–206).

Nostrils

The nostril is single and oval in shape at 5.4 mm. total length, the opening becomes gradually longer and slenderer up to 6.2 mm. standard length, and the nostril is double with well-separated openings at 9.7 mm. (figs. 3 to 6).

Gill rakers

Adults have been reported to have as many as 83 gill rakers on the lower limb of the first arch (Fowler 1936, p. 585). The number of gill rakers increases with age or size, as I found the following counts of gill rakers on the lower limb of the first arch in a series of larval and juvenile specimens: 15 in a 19-mm. standard length fish; 22 in a 29-

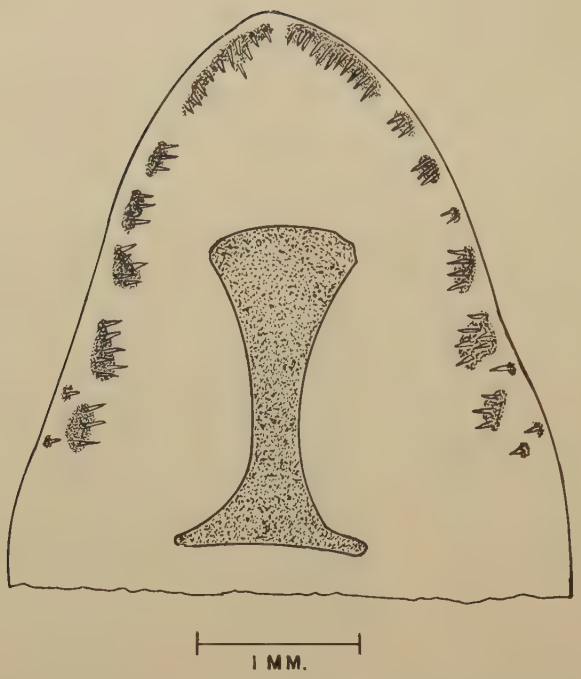

FIGURE 18.—Teeth on the tongue of a 59-mm. specimen. (Camera Lucida drawing from cleared and stained material.)

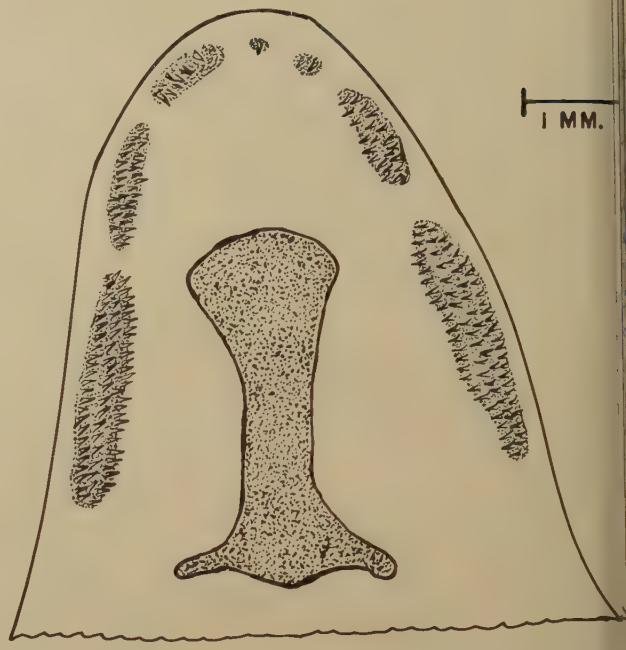

FIGURE 19.—Teeth on the tongue of a 117-mm. specimen. (Camera Lucida drawing from cleared and stained material.)

mm. specimen; 32 in a 59-mm. specimen; and 48 in a 117-mm. specimen.

GROWTH

Two investigators have estimated the growth of striped mullet along the south Atlantic coast of the United States.

Jacot (1920, p. 220), working largely in North Carolina, said, "The arrival of the jumping mullet in April marks the beginning of its second season on our Atlantic coast; its age ranges from 14 to 17 months and its size from 120 to 200 mm. (5 to 8 inches)." Converted to standard lengths these fish would be 95 to 160 mm. In his summary (p. 227), Jacot said the fish have reached a foot or more (300+ mm. total length or 235 mm. standard length) by the second fall (October and November), and are 2 years old and mature.

Higgins (1928, pp. 528–529), also working in North Carolina, stated—

> Juvenile mullet of 22 millimeters body length appear at Beaufort by the middle of January. They become more abundant during February, March, and April, but there is little growth until the middle of April, when the water temperature reaches about 20° C. In May the rate of growth increases rapidly and continues, at an average of approximately 2 centimeters per month, through October.

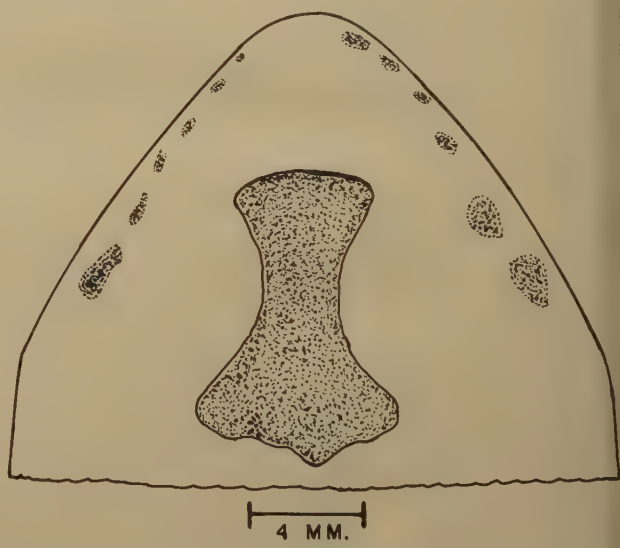

FIGURE 20.—Bony structures in the tongue of a 390-mm. specimen. (Camera Lucida drawing from cleared and stained material.)

He also said,

> The yearling stock that appears at Beaufort in the middle of January as individuals less than 1 inch long and attains a total length of about 7 inches by October seldom is taken.

(Seven inches=177 mm. total length or about 140 mm. standard length.) Higgins also indicated

p. 626) that in the sounds during the winter and spring months he found a size group of mullet which ranged from 110 to 180 or 190 mm. body length (approximates standard length).

For Georgia, I estimated the growth of striped mullet from the seine material. The first recruits appeared along Georgia beaches in November when about 18 or 19 mm. standard length (fig. 21). By January, the largest of these recruits were about 29 mm., indicating a growth of only 5 mm. a month. No growth was evident during the coldest winter months, but between February and March the growth was about 10 mm.—this coincides with warming of the waters along the Georgia coast (Anderson 1957a). From March to October, increase in size progresses at a rate of about 17 mm. a month. From these data it appears that striped mullet in Georgia from the earliest spawning (October; see Spawning, p. 518) reach a length of about 160 mm. standard length by the end of their first year. Those spawned later in the season, and hence being several months younger, reach a size of 90 to 100 mm. by winter (fig. 21).

During the winter and early spring (November to April), it is evident that at least two year classes of striped mullet are represented in the seine collections (fig. 21). The older group, which ranges in size from about 95 to 160 mm., represents fish late in their first year to early in their second year of life (a similar situation was reported for North Carolina by both Higgins and Jacot). Applying the growth rate of 17 mm. a month, it seems quite probable that the smallest of these would reach a size of about 200 mm. by late fall or at approximately 2 years of age (Jacot estimated 300+ mm. total length or about 235 mm. by the second fall and 2 years old). We captured only a few of these larger mullet.

Kilby (1949, p. 19), from work on the west coast of Florida said,

> Assuming that the larger specimens collected in succeeding months represent the larger specimens of preceding months, it appears that a given specimen of 18 mm. in October may reach approximately 27 mm. by late November, 35 mm. by the latter half of January, 54 mm. by mid-March, and 65 mm. by mid-April.

This growth is comparable to the rate of increase I have found for the species in Georgia, but indicates a more steady rate of growth not interrupted by a period of no growth during midwinter.

Gunter (1945, p. 51), from work in lower Texas, indicates that the young striped mullet appear on Texas beaches as early as November at a size of 24 to 25 mm. total length (about 20 mm. standard length) and that the largest of these reach a size of about 108 mm. total length (about 87 mm. standard length) by June. This rate of growth is identical to that which I find for the species in Georgia. However, Gunter indicates the largest specimens of this group to be 148 mm. total length (about 117 mm. standard length) in November at about 1 year of age. This growth rate from June to November is much lower than the rate I found for Georgia and Higgins found for North Carolina. I believe, as Gunter himself suggested, that some of his mullet in these later months were *M. curema*—this would more nearly fit the size range that might be expected at this time of year for *M. curema* (Anderson 1957a).

In summary, it appears that the growth rates of striped mullet as indicated by these studies in widely separated sections of the south Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States are quite comparable, except that in North Carolina a more extended winter season delays growth for a longer period in the spring. Figure 22 is a diagrammatic presentation of the growth rates, for the first year only, as presented by various workers from North Carolina to Texas.

SPAWNING

Suggestions as to time and place of spawning for the striped mullet along the south Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States have been made by several investigators. Before presenting my own findings, a summary of these previous observations is desirable.

Jacot (1920), from work in North Carolina, said that spawning occurs from September to December with peak spawning in October and November. He indicated with reference to place of spawning (p. 222) that "they move slowly down the coast *en masse* both outside and inside the Banks, spawning as necessity demands."

Higgins (1928, p. 625), also working in North Carolina, said—

> At present no spawning fish have been observed, nor have the eggs been taken in tow nets, but it is believed that proper means will reveal the presence of eggs in the open sea. As the fish with evidently mature eggs are taken on their seaward migration at this time of year, spawning

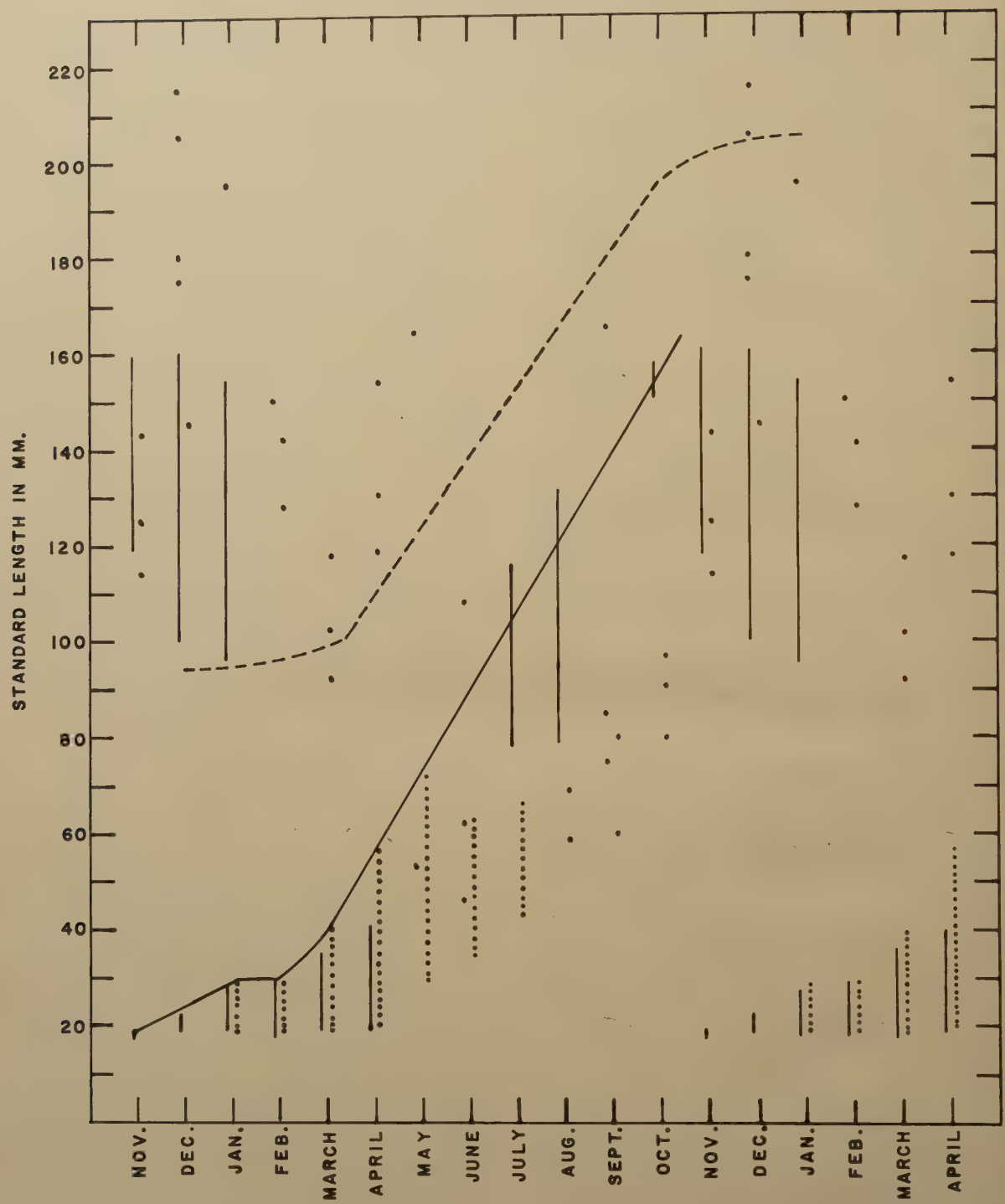

FIGURE 21.—Monthly size ranges of striped mullet, *M. cephalus*, seined from two locations in Georgia: St. Simons Beach (vertical solid line) and Sapelo Marsh (vertical dotted line). Data cover period of March 1953 to December 1956. Size ranges given represent the smallest to largest specimens taken during any given month in this period. Isolated specimens are indicated by large black dots (see tables 3 and 4 for occurrence data). The growth curves are discussed in text.

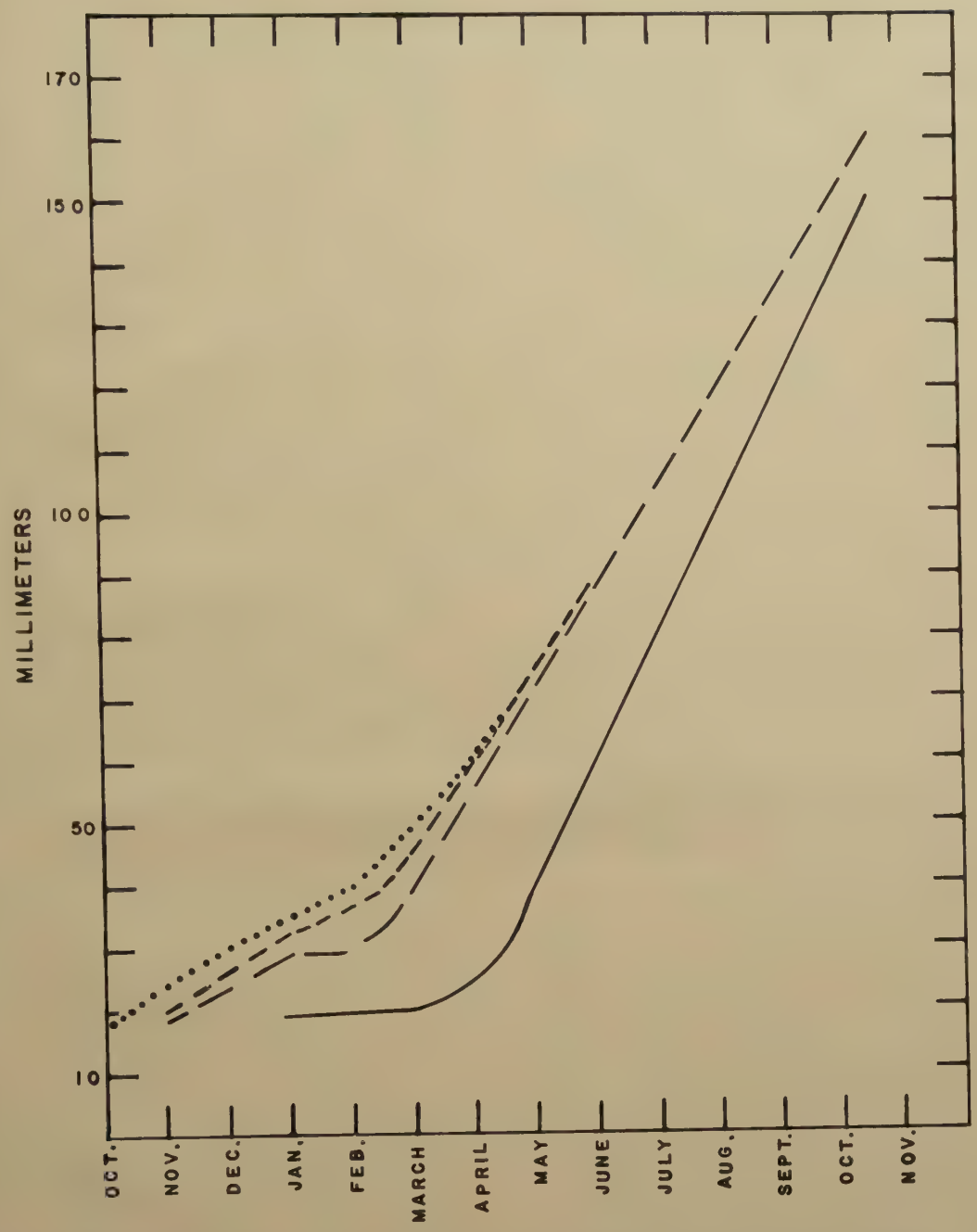

FIGURE 22.—Growth of striped mullet during first year of life as estimated by several workers; Higgins for North Carolina (solid line); Anderson for Georgia (long dashes; present paper); Gunter for Texas (short dashes); and Kilby for west coast of Florida (dotted line).

may be said to occur during November and December; and it is likely that the spawning season is of limited duration, as the eggs are of approximately the same development throughout the ovaries of the fish, and as the young appear the following spring in very uniform size groups.

Taylor et al. (1951, p. 115) indicated that adult striped mullet in North Carolina "school up" in the fall (October and November) and move to the inlets. Of these he said,

> These fish carry spawn, indicating that this is a spawning migration. The fish move out of the inlets in November and December, usually on a northerly wind (according to old-timers) and spawn in the ocean. Spawning is believed to occur in the vicinity of the inlets because

within 2 or 3 weeks, young mullet are found entering the inlets.

Gunter (1945, p. 51) said of striped mullet in Texas—

In summary, the large mullet go to the Gulf in the fall and congregate near the passes on the outside beaches. Spawning takes place there and extends from late October to early January, with the peak probably falling in late November and early December.

Broadhead (1953, p. 21), from work in northwest Florida, said—

No observations of the spawning of mullet have been made in northwest Florida. However, indirect evidence indicates that the fish spawn offshore, probably from 5 to 20 miles, in the Gulf of Mexico.

He indicated (p. 6) that this spawning occurs in the late fall and is about completed by early December.

Kilby (1955, p. 213), from work along Florida's west coast, said—

In summary, the breeding season is long, extending from October through May at Cedar Key and from December through July at Bayport.

In summary, these workers, excepting Kilby, have indicated a late-fall to winter spawning period (October to January limits—peak November to December), and most indicate that spawning occurs at sea, ranging from close to shore to some 20 miles at sea.

My observations on time and place of spawning along the south Atlantic coast of the United States are based on three sets of data: Larvae taken in plankton tows from the MV. *Theodore N. Gill* operations (table 1); larvae from dip-net collections of the *Gill* cruises (table 2); and occurrence of young on the Georgia coast as indicated by seine collections in beach and marsh habitats (tables 3 and 4).

Figure 1 illustrates the locations of capture of larvae from plankton and dip-net operations.

Information from plankton tows alone (table 1) shows a spawning season extending from late November or early December into February. Assuming a period of 3 to 4 weeks for larvae to attain a size of about 20 mm., the dip-net data (table 2) likewise indicate a spawning season of December into February. Under the same assumption, data from Georgia seine collections (tables 3 and 4) show that spawning occurs as early as October, with November 19 the earliest date larvae about 20 mm. were taken; but these small larvae were not taken in abundance until January, indicating a peak spawning beginning in December. From these data, the spawning season of striped mullet along the south Atlantic coast of the United States is indicated as October to February, but it is confined largely to a period of November to January with the peak in December.

My evidence is that striped mullet spawn offshore from lower Florida to North Carolina over a broad area extending from about the 20-fathom line into the Gulf Stream. Figure 1 illustrates that larvae taken in plankton tows were over this area, whereas none were taken near shore except in lower Florida where the Continental Shelf is narrow and the Gulf Stream close to shore. I found silver mullet to spawn in this same offshore habitat (Anderson 1957a).

There is only one authentic record of observations of spawning activities of striped mullet, and this is further evidence of offshore spawning. Arnold and Thompson (1958) report observing a school of mullet spawning in the Gulf of Mexico over the Continental Slope in depths from 500 to 900 fathoms about 40 to 50 miles southeast of the Mississippi River Delta.

In contrast with spawning of the silver mullet, which begins in early spring when water temperatures are rising over the Continental Shelf (Anderson 1957a), the striped mullet spawn during late fall or winter, when water temperatures are falling.

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INDEX TO VOLUME 58

Page

ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT OF TESTIS AFTER UNILATERAL GONADECTOMY, WITH OBSERVATIONS ON NORMAL TESTIS OF RAINBOW TROUT, by O. H. Robertson ... 9–30
Ahlstrom, Elbert H., and Robert C. Counts: DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF *Vinciguerria lucetia* AND RELATED SPECIES IN THE EASTERN PACIFIC ... 363–416
Ahlstrom, Elbert H., John D. Isaacs, James R. Thrailkill, and Lewis W. Kidd: HIGH-SPEED PLANKTON SAMPLER ... 187–214
Aku [skipjack] boat interview sheet ... 278
catch report ... 275, 276
monthly report ... 273
Alaska sockeye salmon investigations ... 83, 88, 168
alalunga, Germo ... 61
Alopias pelagicus, thresher shark ... 338
superciliosus ... 338
vulpinus ... 338
Alosa sapidissima, American shad ... 473
American shad, Migrations of ... 473
life history ... 474, 491
tagging along Atlantic coast ... 474
ANADROMY IN NORTH AMERICAN SALMONIDAE, by George A. Rounsefell ... 171–185
Anadromy in salmonidae:
duration of stay in the sea ... 176
extent of migrations in the sea ... 175
Occurrence of fresh-water forms ... 179
mortality after spawning ... 179
spawning habits and habitat ... 179
state of maturity attained at sea ... 178
ANALYSIS OF CATCH STATISTICS OF THE HAWAIIAN SKIPJACK FISHERY, by Daniel T. Yamashita ... 253–278
Anchovy catches with high-speed sampler ... 197
Anderson, William W.: LARVAL DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH, AND SPAWNING OF STRIPED MULLET (*Mugil cephalus*) ALONG THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COAST OF THE UNITED STATES ... 501–519
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE CUTTHROAT TROUT, by Oliver B. Cope ... 417–442
Atlantic coast migrations of American shad, by Gerald B. Talbot and James E. Sykes ... 473–490
migration pattern ... 486, 487
Atlantic Ocean pound-net fishery ... 498
Atlantic, southern, striped mullet ... 501
Auxis thazard, frigate mackerel ... 49–52

Bait fishery for use in taking skipjack ... 253
live bait areas ... 269
Blacktip shark, *Carcharhinus melanopterus* ... 337
Bradley, W. H., and Peter Cooke: LIVING AND ANCIENT POPULATIONS OF THE CLAM *Gemma gemma* IN A MAINE COAST TIDAL FLAT ... 305–334

Carcharhinus melanopterus ... 337
pelagic shark, Central Pacific, food habits ... 337–349
Central Pacific waters, tuna larvae distribution ... 31
cephalus, Mugil:
striped mullet of the South Atlantic ... 501–519
structural characters ... 509
Chipman, Walter A., Theodore R. Rice, and Thomas J. Price: UPTAKE AND ACCUMULATION OF RADIOACTIVE ZINC BY MARINE PLANKTON, FISH, AND SHELLFISH ... 279–292
Clam, hard (*Venus mercenaria*), filtering rates ... 75
Clam, hard-shell, Uptake of radioactive zinc ... 289
Clam larvae, food for ... 298, 300
Clam, soft-shell, Sagadahoc Bay, Maine ... 305
living and ancient populations ... 315, 327
Connecticut Rivers and shad migrations ... 485, 498
Cooke, Peter, and W. H. Bradley: LIVING AND ANCIENT POPULATIONS OF THE CLAM *Gemma gemma* IN A MAINE COAST TIDAL FLAT ... 305–334
Counts, Robert C. and Elbert H. Ahlstrom: DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF *Vinciguerria lucetia* AND RELATED SPECIES IN THE EASTERN PACIFIC ... 363–416
Cope, Oliver B.: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE CUTTHROAT TROUT ... 417–442
Crassosterium virginica ... 279
Cristovomer namaycush ... 180
Cutthroat trout bibliography ... 417

Davis, Harry C., and Robert R. Guillard: RELATIVE VALUE OF TEN GENERA OF MICROORGANISMS AS FOODS FOR OYSTER AND CLAM LARVAE ... 293–304
Day, C. Godfrey: SURFACE CIRCULATION IN THE GULF OF MAINE AS DEDUCED FROM DRIFT BOTTLES ... 443–472
Decline in sockeye salmon of Karluk River, Alaska ... 83–169
Delaware River shad ... 487
DESCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF LARVAE OF FOUR SPECIES OF TUNA IN CENTRAL PACIFIC WATERS, by Walter M. Matsumoto ... 31–72
DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF *Vinciguerria lucetia* AND RELATED SPECIES IN THE EASTERN PACIFIC, by Elbert H. Ahlstrom and Robert C. Counts ... 363–416

Page

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND HABITS OF PELAGIC SHARKS IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN, by Donald W. Strasburg 335–361
Distribution of tuna larvae in Central Pacific 57–60
Dunaliella 293
Drift bottles, Gulf of Maine, Circulation of 443
Dunbar, Clarence E., EXPERIMENTAL EXPLOITATION OF FISH POPULATIONS 215–252

Eastern Pacific, distribution of *Vinciguerria lucetia:*
abundance and larval development 389
eggs 367
other species of *Vinciguerria* 398
EFFECT OF NEW JERSEY-NEW YORK POUND-NET CATCHES ON SHAD RUNS OF HUDSON AND CONNECTICUT RIVERS, by Paul R. Nichols 491–500
EXPERIMENTAL EXPLOITATION OF FISH POPULATIONS, by Ralph P. Silliman and James S. Gutsell, with the technical assistance of Clarence E. Dunbar and Saufley B. Friddle 215–252

FACTORS CAUSING DECLINE IN SOCKEYE SALMON OF KARLUK RIVER, ALASKA, by George A. Rounsefell 83–169
Fire Island (N.Y.) pound nets for shad 487
Frigate mackeral, *Auxis thazard* 49
FILTERING RATES OF THE HARD CLAM (*Venus mercenaria*) DETERMINED WITH RADIOACTIVE PHYTOPLANKTON, by Theodore R. Rice and Rebecca J. Smith 73–82
Fish catches with high-speed sampler 207
Fish uptake of radioactive zinc 279–292
Florida, occurrence of striped mullet 504
Food of oyster and clam larvae 293, 295, 298, 300
Friddle, Saufley B., EXPERIMENTAL EXPLOITATION OF FISH POPULATIONS 215–252

Gemma gemma, ancient and living clam population 327, 315
Germo alalunga 61
Gonostoma raoulensis 399
Georges Bank, statistics of fishery 5
Gonadectomy on rainbow trout 9, 11, 30
Great blue shark, *Prionace glauca* 337
Growth of striped mullet, Florida 514
Guillard, Robert R., and Harry C. Davis: RELATIVE VALUE OF TEN GENERA OF MICRO-ORGANISMS AS FOODS FOR OYSTER AND CLAM LARVAE 293–304
Gulf of Maine, drift bottle circulation 443
shad reported in Gulf 485
water-circulation chart of Gulf 447
Guppies, experimental growth in tanks in laboratory 215–252
principles of exploitation of fish populations 236
Gutsell, James S., and Ralph P. Silliman: EXPERIMENTAL EXPLOITATION OF FISH POPULATIONS 215–252

Haddock, Georges Bank 1–7
Hard clam, *Venus mercenaria*, filtering rates for feeding 73

Page

Hawaiian skipjack fishing locality for skipjack 204
HIGH-SPEED PLANKTON SAMPLER: By Elbert H. Ahlstrom, John D. Isaacs, James R. Thrailkill, and Lewis W. Kidd 187–214
Hudson River shad migrations 485, 498

Isochrysis galbana, food of oyster and clam larvae 293
Isaacs, John D., Elbert H. Ahlstrom, James R. Thrailkill, and Lewis W. Kidd: HIGH-SPEED PLANKTON SAMPLER 187–214

Jack mackerel catches with high-speed sampler 201

Karluk Lake, History of sockeye salmon investigations 83
salmon runs compared with other localities 88
Katsuwonus pelamis, skipjack 31, 40, 48, 58
statistics of the skipjack fishery 253
Kauai, skipjack fishing area 264
Kidd, Lewis W., Elbert H. Ahlstrom, John D. Isaacs, and James R. Thrailkill: HIGH-SPEED PLANKTON SAMPLER 187–214

Lagodon rhomboides, pinfish 279, 287
Lamna diptropis, mackerel shark 337
Lantern fish catches with high speed sampler 201
LARVAL DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH, AND SPAWNING OF STRIPED MULLET (*Mugil cephalus*) ALONG THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COAST OF THE UNITED STATES, by William W. Anderson 501–519
Lebistes reticulatus, guppy, reared in aquarium experiments 215
Leuroglossus stilbus 379
Life history of American shad 474
Life history of Karluck River sockeye salmon 85
Little tunny, Euthynnus yaito 46
Live-bait fishery for skipjack fishing, Hawaiian waters 267
LIVING AND ANCIENT POPULATIONS OF THE CLAM *Gemma gemma* IN A MAINE COAST TIDAL FLAT, by W. H. Bradley and Peter Cooke 305–334

Mackerel shark, *Lamna diptropis* 337
Maine Coast soft-shelled clam, Sagdahoc Bay 305
Late geologic history of the flat 327
Sampling ancient population 329
Maine Rivers and shad migrations 485
Massachusetts recoveries of tagged shad 487
Matsumoto, Walter M.: DESCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF LARVAE OF FOUR SPECIES OF TUNA IN CENTRAL PACIFIC WATERS 31–72
Maui, skipjack fishing area 264
mercenaria, Venus, hard clam 73
Micro-organisms as food for oyster and clam larvae:
Chlamydomonas 293
Chlorella 293
Chlorococcum 293
Chrysophyta 293
Chlorophyceae 293

Page

Micropogon undulatus, croaker 279, 285
Migration rate of tagged shad 482
Migrations of American shad 473
Chesapeake Bay to Gulf of Maine 485
Monochrysis lutheri 293
Mortality rate of Georges Bank haddock 1–7
Mugil cephalus, striped mullet of the south Atlantic 501
Mya arenaria, soft-shelled clam 305

Narooma benefica 399
NATURAL MORTALITY RATE OF THE GEORGES BANK HADDOCK, by Clyde C. Taylor 1–7
Nehu, baitfish off Oahu and Maui Islands 269
Neothunnus macropterus, yellowfin 31, 32, 35, 58, 63
Net York-New Jersey pound-net catches 491, 494
Nichols, Paul R.: EFFECT OF NEW JERSEY-NEW YORK POUND-NET CATCHES ON SHAD RUNS OF HUDSON AND CONNECTICUT RIVERS 491–500
Nitzschia closterium, phytoplankton, in radioactive uptake 281–283
North Carolina, striped mullet 514

Oahu, skipjack fishing area 264
Occurrence of larval forms, striped mullet 504
Oncorhynchus:
O. gorbuscha 175, 178, 179–183
O. ishikawee 172
O. keta 171, 175, 178
O. kisutch 172
O. nerka 83, 172
O. tshawytscha 171, 173, 175, 178, 179
O. n. kennerlyi 176, 177, 181
Oyster larvae, food for 295, 300

Pacific Oceanic Fishery Investigations in, Central Pacific 335
Pelagic sharks 338
Parathunnus sibi 61
Pecten irradians, bay scallop 279
Phaeodactylum tricornutum, food of oyster and clam larvae 293
Plankton catches with high speed sampler 190
Plankton, Uptake of radioactive zinc 282
Platymonas as food of clam and oyster larvae 293
Pomolobus pseudoharengus 473
P. aestivalis 473
Pound-net catches, New York-New Jersey 492
Pound-net fishery, Atlantic Ocean 498
Pound nets for shad on New Jersey coast 487
Predicting catch of skipjack 266
Predicting catch of skipjack, Hawaiian fishery 266
Price, Thomas J., Walter A. Chipman, and Theodore R. Rice: UPTAKE AND ACCUMULATION OF RADIOACTIVE ZINC BY MARINE PLANKTON, FISH, AND SHELLFISH 279–292
Prionace glauca, great blue shark 337
Prymnesium parvum, food micro-organism for larvae 293
Pterolamiops longimanus, whitetip shark 337

Page

Radioactive phytoplankton use to determine filtering rates of hard clams 73
Radioactive zinc uptake in plankton, fish, and shellfish 279–292
Rainbow trout gonadectomy 15
RELATIVE VALUE OF TEN GENERA OF MICRO-ORGANISMS AS FOODS FOR OYSTER AND CLAM LARVAE, by Harry C. Davis and Robert R. Guillard 293–304
Rice, Theodore R., and Rebecca J. Smith: FILTERING RATES OF THE HARD CLAM (*Venus mercenaria*) DETERMINED WITH RADIOACTIVE PHYTOPLANKTON 73–82
Rice, Theodore R., Walter A. Chipman, and Thomas J. Price: UPTAKE AND ACCUMULATION OF RADIOACTIVE ZINC BY MARINE PLANKTON, FISH, AND SHELLFISH 279–292
Robertson, O. H.: ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT OF TESTIS AFTER UNILATERAL GONADECTOMY, WITH OBSERVATIONS ON NORMAL TESTIS OF RAINBOW TROUT 9–30
Rounsefell, George A.: ANADROMY IN NORTH AMERICAN SALMONIDAE 171–185
Rounsefell, George A.: FACTORS CAUSING DECLINE IN SOCKEYE SALMON OF KARLUK RIVER, ALASKA 83–169

Sagadahoc Bay clams 305
Salmo:
S. clarki 177
S. trutta 173, 175, 177
S. trutta fario 173
S. trutta trutta or S. levensis 173
S. gairdneri 9, 175, 176, 177
S. gairdneri nelsoni 171, 175
S. salar 173, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179
S. salmo s. sebago 176
Salmonidae, anadronomous pattern in 171
degrees of anadromy 171
relation of anadromy to latitude 175
relation of anadromy to lethal temperatures 181
Salvelinus:
S. alpinus 171, 175
S. fontinalis 171, 175, 177
S. malma 171, 175, 177, 178
S. aureolus 179
S. oquassa 176
Sampler, high-speed 187
calibration of 207
operation instructions 207
sapidissima, Alosa, Atlantic coast shad 473
Sardine catches with high speed sampler 195
Shad, *Alosa sapidissima:*
analysis of tag returns 486
homing behavior 486
North Carolina 485
life history 474, 491
migration evidence 485
tagging and recoveries 474–476
Shark, black tip 337

Page

Sharks of Central Pacific:
abundance 337, 338, 343, 345, 346
food habits 349
range 338, 348
reproduction 351, 354
Sharks, pelagic, Central Pacific 335–361
Shellfish:
Uptake of radioactive zinc 279, 283
sibi, Parathunnus, tuna larva 61
Silky shark, *Eulamia floridans* 337
Silliman, Ralph P., and James S. Gutsell: EXPERIMENTAL EXPLOITATION OF FISH POPULATIONS 215–252
Skipjack fishery off Hawaii:
relative abundance 264
catch records, 1900–1953 253–278
predicting the catch 266
Skipjack, *Katsuwonus pelamis* 40, 58, 63
Sockeye salmon, Karluk River 83
Soupfin shark, *Galcorhinus zyopterus* 337
Smith, Rebecca J., and Theodore R. Rice: FILTERING RATES OF THE HARD CLAM (Venus mercenaria) DETERMINED WITH RADIOACTIVE PHYTOPLANKTON 73–82
Sockeye salmon decline in Karluk River Alaska:
abundance 102
decline 83–169
life history of the sockeye 124
long-term changes in environment 140
temperature relation between Karluk and Kodiak 164
Spawning mullet in North Carolina 515
Stichococcus, micro-organism as food of oyster 293
Strasburg, Donald W.: DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND HABITS OF PELAGIC SHARKS IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN 335–361
Striped mullet, *Mugil cephalus:*
development from larval stage 504
growth 514
spawning 515
SURFACE CIRCULATION IN THE GULF OF MAINE AS DEDUCED FROM DRIFT BOTTLES, by C. Godfrey Day 443–472
Sykes, James E., and Gerald B. Talbot: ATLANTIC COAST MIGRATIONS OF AMERICAN SHAD 473–490

Tag recoveries:
along Atlantic coast 479, 482, 483
before and during spawning of shad in spring, N.Y 478
from shad tagged in Maine 482
from shad tagged on spawning grounds 482, 483
shad released at Solomons, Md 486
tag returns analyzed 477
Talbot, Gerald B., and James E. Sykes: ATLANTIC COAST MIGRATIONS OF AMERICAN SHAD 473–490
Taylor, Clyde C.: NATURAL MORTALITY RATE OF THE GEORGES BANK HADDOCK 1–7

Page

Ten genera of micro-organisms 293–304
Thrailkill, James R., Elbert H. Ahlstrom, John D. Isaacs, and Lewis W. Kidd: HIGH-SPEED PLANKTON SAMPLER 187–214
Thresher shark:
Alopias pelagicus 338
A. superciliosus 338
A. vulpinus 338
Trout, rainbow, gonadectomy 9–30
Tuna in Central Pacific:
Description of species 32
larvae of four species 31–72
spawning area 62
vertical distribution of larvae 60

UPTAKE AND ACCUMULATION OF RADIOACTIVE ZINC BY MARINE PLANKTON, FISH, AND SHELLFISH, by Walter A. Chipman, Theodore R. Rice, and Thomas J. Price 279–292

Venus Mercenaria, hard clam, filtering rates 73, 279
Vessels:
Albatross in Alaska (1898, 1899) sockeye salmon investigations 84
Albatross II (Gulf of Maine)
Cruise in 1931 463, 464
Cruise in 1932 452, 455
Albatross III, Gulf of Maine and Grand Banks (See surface circulation)
Cruise 46 (1953) 450, 451
Cruise 48 (1953) 443, 456
Cruise 50 (1953) 465
Cruise 57 (1955) 448
Cruise 58 (1955) 452
Cruise 60 (1955) 460, 461
Cruise 61 (1955) 463, 466
Cruise 71 (1956) 446, 449
Cruise 72 (1956) 452, 454
Cruise 73 (1956) 460, 462
Cruise 75 (1956) 463, 467
Cruise 76 (1956) 468, 470
Atlantis: (See surface circulation)
Cruise 16 (1933) 468
Vessels in shark investigations, Central Pacific:
Cavalieri 335–337
Commonwealth 335–337
Charles H. Gilbert 335–337
John R. Manning 335–337
Hugh M. Smith 335–337
North American 335–337
Oceanic 335–337
Vessels:
South Atlantic mullet investigations:
Theodore N. Gill, 1954 and 1956 501, 502
Tuna investigations, Hawaiian waters:
Hugh M. Smith 61–71

	Page
Vinciguerria attenuata (Eastern Pacific)	363–365
V. lucetia	363–416
V. nimbaria	399, 405
V. pacifici	399
V. poweriae	363–365, 400–405
V. sanzoi	399, 405
Water circulation in the Gulf of Maine	443–472
Whitetip shark, *Pterolamiops longimanus*	337
yaito, Euthynnus, little tunny	46
Yamashita, Daniel T.: ANALYSIS OF CATCH STATISTICS OF THE HAWAIIAN SKIPJACK FISHERY	253–278
Yellowfin, *Neothunnus macropterus*	31–57
Zinc radioactivity (see Uptake and accumulation)	279

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